Policy Order #12

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To the Council,

I am writing to you today regarding Policy Order #12 relating to special permits in the Central Square Overlay District proposed by Councilors Carlone and Mazen. As an advocate for increased housing, both market rate and subsidized, within Cambridge and the region this sounds like something that should be supported on the surface. However, as with other development related policy orders submitted from Councilor Carlone, the real goal is not to increase overall housing production. Its true purpose is to obstruct a proposed development.

Councilors Carlone and Mazen along with their supporters in the Cambridge Residents Alliance seem to have given up on persuasion, especially as it relates to the Mass & Main development proposed by Twining/Normandy Partners, and are now resorting to other tactics. This pattern goes back further than this one proposal.

Starting with the master plan proposal which was also meant to lead on a moratorium on large scale development, the anti-density, anti-housing forces in the city have continued pushing policies that are meant to delay and stop new housing production within Cambridge. The failure of the master plan initiative to provide a moratorium led to the proposal to take special permit granting authority from the Planning Board (an effective moratorium). That of course didn't work either as everyone could see what the true purpose was.

These tactics reached absurd levels in the recent Ordinance Committee hearing on the Twining/Normandy position in which anti-development forces resorted to alluding that there was corruption among pro-housing Councilors due to campaign donations. Councilor Carlone's "alternative proposal" was also quite troublesome as it was not dealing with current development realities, incentives, or real world conditions that the city faces. Now we have this new proposal, with the core purpose of removing the ability for Normandy/Twining to build office or lab space therefore hoping that they are forced to build housing at a lower than proposed height and density. Even if this would work, which is questionable, it would lead to less overall housing units for the site, both market and subsidized. I suspect that if the proposed upzoning passes there will be discussion of legal action from the Cambridge Residents Alliance regardless of whether they have a case.

I also find it interesting that after expressing the need for a comprehensive master plan and arguing against piecemeal development and zoning, the Councilors are now proposing a zoning change for all of Central Square because of one property that they wish to stop.

Beyond just these proposals being bad for the city and exacerbating our housing crisis the Councilors know that they have no chance of actually passing this order or the alternative for the Mass & Main site. This has gone beyond making a case on the merits and is now becoming a waste of time for not only the City Council, but the community. These delays and policy games are benefiting no one and take valuable time away from other matters the Council should address.

We are in desperate need of additional housing in this city and the Twining/Normandy petition will provide some of that. Admittedly, not enough to solve our affordability crisis, but we have to start somewhere. Delay after delay and distraction after distraction prevent the Council and the city from finding actual and realistic solutions to our problems.

While I respect everyone's right to continue to advocate for and against development, these underhanded and ineffective stunts are not worthy of the City or its citizens. When this policy order goes nowhere I hope that this is the end of such tactics and that future development related proposals are made in good faith with the stated and actual goal of moving Cambridge forward.

Thank you for your time,

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